

REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

MR. EDGAR'S SWELL DINNER

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

Mr. Alexander Edgar looks upon salesmanship as one of the most important branches of American life, as it is. Some day when the educators come to see it as he does there will be courses in salesmanship in every high school, every college and every university in the land. He has preached salesmanship, taught salesmanship and written books on salesmanship. To-day, broadly speaking, it costs almost as much to sell goods as it does to make them. In some departments of industry the cost of selling—that is, from the making of the goods to the delivery to the ultimate consumer—is far in excess of the cost of manufacturing. Such a condition is absurd. It restricts production, curtails consumption, and, being wrong, must be corrected. In no place in the world is the cost of selling so high proportionately as in America. This is owing to extravagance, waste, ignorance. Slowly but surely conditions are being improved.

There was a time when craft, conviviality and graft played large parts in selling. Goodness and honesty count far more to-day. The real salesman, however, has to have other qualifications besides soundness and honesty. He must believe in the goods he sells, and, having that belief, he must know how to present them most attractively to each and every kind of buyer. To do this he necessarily must be a student of men and be able to get their minds in tune with his. Psychology enters to a great degree in the success of salesmanship. The real salesman studies psychology until he masters the real system of mental process. Once in a long time a real salesman is born, but ninety-nine times out of a hundred or 999 times out of 1,000 the real salesman is the development of earnest application and study—the same earnest application and study that win in the law, in medicine and in other branches of endeavor.

Some persons think any one with check and a fluent tongue is fitted for salesmanship. The real salesman rarely is glib. He seldom says a word too much. He is intellectual, not gaseous. He is a gentleman, not an impudent, self-sufficient creature.

Edgar probably has done as much as any one man in the United States to raise the standard of salesmanship. There is a bit of the evangelist about him. He is a most entertaining conversationalist, and has a fine vein of humor. Most teachers are prosy. He is not. He has force, imagination and the power to stir the emotions of men. Whether he talks to a group of veteran salesmen or to recruits about to enter the ranks of the vast army of commercial travelers he can arouse an enthusiasm and develop a spirit

that would astonish a person who did not appreciate how deep a sentimental influence there really is in every business.

But even great teachers like Edgar make mistakes. Through one of the commonest of errors he lost one of the best of his accounts. It was in the days when, in addition to superintending the manufacture, he was the salesman of a New England brassware house. One of his most valued customers was a Pittsburg glass manufacturer. Glass men are large buyers of brass goods. Bottles must have stoppers. Lamp chimneys must have holders. A thousand and one products of the glass factories require brass attachments.

Between the salesman and the buyer of the glass company there was a most kindly feeling. They had much in common. They were men of high principles, clean living and alert to most of the things of interest in life. Of warm impulse and keen minds, they discussed subjects of every character and kind. In nothing were they in accord than in regard to salesmanship. The glass man delighted in hearing the New Englander lay bare

the crudities and the waste of the system that then prevailed.

A true business man is an economist. What is the economy in saving money in the manufacture of goods if it is to be lost in the buying or selling? If economy is to be established in one branch of a business, why not in all? More than half of the men traveling at that time believed in the maxim caveat emptor (let the buyer beware). To sell was the thing, it did not matter how the thing was done, and the justified the means. Occasionally the approach was made through a buyer's cupid, occasionally through his appetite, but seldom through his sense of business economy. Good-fellowship, or what was termed good-fellowship, played a decided part in selling. Of course, it all had to be included in the bill. The more the cost of selling the higher the price the buyer must pay.

It was all wrong, and it could not last. Edgar and his Pittsburg friend agreed to this. They longed to see a better day ushered in. Much as was the waste through conviviality and graft, it was not to be compared with that through incompetency. There was as much difference between a well-trained salesman and the average one as there was between the skilled workman and the unskilled. The country was flooded with unskilled salesmen. When the day dawned that the skilled salesman prevailed they saw a country transformed. America, with its vast resources of raw material, would command the trade and commerce of the world. People would be better clothed and better fed at a lower cost. It was little short of a crime, it seemed to them, for great industries to be utilized to only one-half or two-thirds of their capacity and for big mills to shut down for weeks or months at a time when the world needed their products. The world could use their products if the products cost less.

The cost of manufacture was not so great, but the cost of selling was out of reason. The proportion, if studied, earnest men gave to the improvement of the system of selling the same depth of thought, the same tireless energy they gave to problems for the improvement of machinery and other economies of production. The trouble was soon eradicated, but somehow man is not so persistent or painstaking in improving man as he is in improving machines to serve the uses of man.

Edgar, buoyant, ardent and sanguine, with a fine contempt for blockheads and wasters, but an abiding faith in the good sense of American merchants, never lost an opportunity to preach the true principles of salesmanship. He talked so well and so entertainingly and had so fine a command of his subject that he was invited to various parts of the country to address commercial bodies, the selling organizations of mammoth corporations, and, now and then, little classes in salesmanship in private schools. Not only that, but he wrote what has become practically a text-book on salesmanship.

Twice a year regularly he went forth from his Connecticut factory to visit the glass men of the Pittsburg and West Virginia territory and round up their orders. When he arrived in Pittsburg he promptly got in touch with his old friend, the buyer. Generally he spent a night or two at the Pittsburg home. Next the families of the New Englander and the glass man became acquainted. Occasionally the salesman would take his wife on a trip with him, and when he did they always were guests at the home of the Pittsburg. The wives of the two men got to like each other so much that they corresponded regularly, and now and then the Pittsburg and his wife took a trip East and visited the Connecticut manufacturer. The world of the Connecticut man was a visit to him, "my wife and I are going all meet in New York."

"Certainly," was the reply. Arrangements were made at once, and when the time came for the meeting the Pittsburg came East with his wife and sister-in-law, and the New Englander and his wife met them at one of the big Broadway hotels.

"Jim," said the New Englander to the Pittsburg man, "you're my guest now, and I am going to see if I cannot make you stay here a delight."

Then Edgar started in. He took the party to Sherry's for dinner. Earlier that day he had a conference with the Maitre d'Hotel. He has a most discriminating taste in foodstuffs, and he knows what appeals to women most, and he knows, too, just what wines go best with certain delicacies, but his taste was not more exquisite than was that of the expert he consulted. Between them there was selected a dainty and as charming a dinner as

that house could serve. The service was perfect, the women were pleased beyond measure, and the men, as they smoked at the end of the meal, were in that spirit of accord that comes to

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men only when they have eaten well, have slipped just enough champagne or still wines to stir the blood and warm the heart, and are soothing the nerves and enjoying the fragrance of such cigars as come from just one little patch of ground out from Havana.

From Sherry's, after the cigars were finished and the women had had a good chance to look about the great restaurant and see such notables as were there, the party drove to one of the theatres. Mr. Edgar had engaged a box. The show was excellent. Possibly it would not have seemed so good to a cold, critical group, but who would not enjoy the theatre after such a repast? Maybe no one but the host saw the bill at Sherry's, but it called for \$116. Every act of the play was delightful to the party, and when the curtain went down on the last act Edgar took his guests in charge once more. This time he escorted them to the theatre. The place was crowded, but he had reserved a table. Lightness, gaiety and brightness are conducive to full eating. It is surprising how much persons of moderate appetite will eat when in pleasant company and when they are under the stimulus of the example of others. May be, too, a little wine, which they are not in the habit of taking, acts as a spur. Those five conservative, staid and good people took seats in the theatre at about 11:30 P. M.

They ate and they chatted and they laughed and they ate some more and drank a little champagne and they looked about the brilliant room at the gay company and were as happy and carefree as they had been at any time from the days of their childhood. After a while one of the women thought it was about midnight and it was time to go back to the hotel. One of the men protested, and then, to add force to his protest, pulled out his watch. He touched the spring and glanced at the face, and then he hastily closed the watch again.

"What time is it?" asked one of the women.

"My watch must be wrong," was the answer.

The other gentleman thereupon consulted his timepiece. He showed such surprise that one of the ladies leaned over to look at his watch.

"Why?" she exclaimed, "It's 3 o'clock!"

And it was.

The men and the women never had enjoyed a more delightful evening. Time never passed more swiftly for them. From Rectory's they went to their hotel, and said "good-by" for the Pittsburgers were to start for home before noon.

Two months later the Connecticut salesman was in Pittsburg to get his semi-annual order from the glass man and then proceed over his regular route. The Pittsburg was glad to see him and inquired about Edgar's family and about various friends of the salesman he had met in the East. When it came to a discussion of business the glass man said he had all the fixtures in stock he needed just then and he could not give an order.

Six months later the Connecticut man called again. The Pittsburg again was delighted to see him and had him out to the house for dinner and to spend the night. But the visitor did not get an order. This time the glass man explained that styles had changed and they had taken up a new line of metal trimmings that seemed to suit their requirements. He was sorry, very sorry, but it could not be helped.

Regularly twice a year for two or three years the visitor visited Pittsburg and called on his old friend, but never did he get another order from him.

All this happened ten years ago. Recently the two men met in Chicago. The world had treated them fairly well since they parted in Pittsburg. The Connecticut man now is president of a corporation that had its headquarters in Chicago. He has all the enthusiasm, all the spirit of his younger days. He still preaches the gospel of good salesmanship in factory, in class and in public hall. He is known by tens of thousands of men. He glories in the progress that is being made in raising the standard of selling, and he looks forward with confidence to the day when America, by reason of its good salesmanship, will be a pattern for the whole industrial world.

The Pittsburg had prospered, too, but no longer in the glass business.

One of two things is almost certain to happen when two friends, both Americans, meet after years of parting. There is going to be an invitation to eat or an invitation to drink. These two old friends went to dinner. They chatted about mutual friends and they chatted about their business careers, and after dinner they went to a theatre. After the theatre they talked about old times some more, and then the Connecticut man determined to get light on the mystery that had puzzled him for a decade.

"Jimmy," he said, "tell me, will you,

why it was I never was able to sell any thing to you after that dinner we had with our families in New York?"

The Pittsburg man looked at the floor for a few moments and then asked, "Haven't you ever guessed?"

"Never," said the Yankee; "I never have had an idea."

"Well," said the Pittsburg man, "I'll tell you. You and I have discussed many times the evils that attend salesmanship. Knowing you as I do, it is possible I should have been ashamed for entertaining the thought I did after that evening in New York. We were friends, but I was a buyer and you were a salesman."

You entertained us royally that night, but there was nothing to warrant you in spending so lavishly for our entertainment. As I talked the matter over with my wife it suddenly occurred

to me that I had placed myself in a most embarrassing position. I had permitted you to do what you and I had deprecated over and over again. The several hundred dollars you had spent was just so much of the waste we had discussed. It would be put in the bill somehow. If it wasn't put in mine it would be in some other man's. I believe in everything that is reasonable and proper. I am neither stilted nor priggish, but knowing your strength of view on this subject, I felt I had put myself where I would be under obligations to you. I made a resolution then and there never again to allow myself to be entertained by a man from whom I bought goods, and I have stuck to the resolution."

The Connecticut man looked at him and smiled. "So that was the reason," he said.

"Yes," replied the Pittsburg man, "I suppose you are ashamed of me for entertaining the suspicion that you would want to buy my influence in that way?"

"Ashamed of you?" exclaimed the New Englander. "Ashamed of you! No sir, I'm proud of you. That is the spirit that should be spread. I wish it was in the heart and mind of every man in America. If it was this would be a better country to live in."

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